"Resistance is hopeless":

Assimilating Queer Theory

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Abstract

'Resistance is hopeless...'

This paper seeks to assimilate Queer Theory: that is, to bring it within the gambit of a 'mainstream' or 'dominant' space: the academy. It does so by historicising Queer Theory, and investigating, if not what it is, then at least what it has been. This makes it possible to engage critically with Queer Theory.

Suggesting that Queer Theory has often employed tropes of assimilation, the paper turns to another cultural site at which such language is popular - science fiction - in order to investigate the assumption of these metaphors. It goes on to suggest some of the assumptions about cultures which underlie these metaphors. Finally, it points to other sites in Queer Theory which undermines these assumptions, and provide other ways - quite uninterested in assimilation - in which to think Queer.

1. Axiomatic (not)

> Queer is meant to be confrontational - opposed to gay assimilationists (Escoffier and Berobe, quoted in Duggan, 1992: 27)

This paper emerges from a series of simple statements.

Queer Theory is profoundly anti-assimilatory.

Queer Theory has profoundly altered the way in which we can use assimilatory metaphors to describe culture.

Queer Theory is careful not to talk about assimilation.

Queer Theory is uninterested in questions of assimilation.

Queer Theory is itself an assimilatory apparatus.

And so on.

2. What assimilation is

- We would like time to prepare our people for assimilation

- Preparation is irrelevant. Your people will be assimilated as easily as Picard has been

> (Commander William T Riker of the USS Enterprise, talking to Locutus of Borg, in *Star Trek: The Next Generation*, 'Best of Both Worlds' part 2)

The Captain of the USS Enterprise has been kidnapped.

An unpleasantly potent alien species, the Borg, has taken him on board their spaceship. As their name suggest, the Borg are half-organic and half-machine, and they set about making Captain Picard into one of them. When he later appears on the viewscreen of his old spaceship to communicate with the remaining crew, they can see that his face is drained of blood, he has mechanical equipment grafted into his skin, his eyes are dead and his personality has vanished.

Captain Picard has been assimilated.

As the Borg exist only to reproduce themselves, it could even be said that he has been assimilated into a 'breeder' culture. The crew are shocked.

This paper sets out to assimilate Queer Theory.

3. The nameless Queer.

Queer Theory carries with it an admirable defensive strategy, a deflector shield of which the USS Enterprise itself might be proud. Lisa Duggan notes that 'various contradictory definitions co-exist' (Duggan, 1992: 21); this may be an understatement. In fact, as Annamarie Jagose notes in her book entitled *Queer Theory*, 'Queer itself can have neither a fundamental logic, nor a consistent set of characteristics ... many of the common understandings of the term contradict each other irresolvably' (96,99). This is Queer's own protection: it is impossible to begin to write histories of Queer, of accounts of the term's usefulness, because any such project would be - inherently and inescapably - un-Queer. For, of course, 'Queer is an ongoing and necessarily unfixed site of engagement and contestation' (Berry and Jagose, 1996: 11). To attempt to define Queer, that is, would be to seek to tie down what cannot be constrained, to explain what must forever escape final meaning, to attempt to regulate that which is energised precisely by its transgressive status. It would be to insist on an identity for Queer Theory, and to ignore the insistently post-identity nature of much of the writing encompassed in the name. It would be to attempt to create a centre for the margin.

Michael Warner's has suggested that when Queer Theory's claims for its own unknowability are accepted, as an academic arena it becomes largely 'intuitive' (quoted in Jagose, 1996: 96). This paper does not wish to suggest any denigation of a feminised term (as 'intuition' is a feminised version of knowledge, certainly); but it can point to the possible dangers of such a position. If knowledge relies on intuition, then it cannot be taught; it cannot necessarily be communicated or explained; and it need not be defended in the terms recognised in academic institutions. What such an account of knowledge fails to account for is the unequal distribution of power in academic situations. If there is no 'centre' to Queer, then the uninitiated cannot discover it. If Queer cannot be defined, who then decides what gets accepted into journals of Queer Theory, is acceptable on Queer Theory courses at universities, published in Queer book series, presented at Queer conferences? Institutional decisions are being made on the basis of a certain understanding

of Queer Theory; and it does indeed appear to be the case that such decisions are currently based on ‘intuition’. As long as Queer retains its radically unknowable status - no centre, no canon, no saints or sinners - and yet functions in institutional situations in which judgements are being made precisely on the basis of such knowledge as is simultaneously being labelled (intuitive), Queer Theory is in a dangerous and damaging position.

This work thus attempts to point towards some little part of the history of 'Queer'. It does not insist that it is establishing the 'real' Queer; it has little interest in the ontology of the movement. Rather it insists that one powerful and recognisable construction of Queer has been as a movement that resists 'assimilation', and insists on 'resistance'.

This work explicitly seeks to assimilate Queer Theory: to draw it into the centre of academic writing, and to render it similar to other critical approaches which do not retain the right to declare themselves ultimately unknowable. For while Queer can certainly be regarded as multivalent and multifarious, as having perhaps as many meanings as it has practitioners, such is the accepted condition of all language and communication. In the face of a resolved and insistent unknowability, it remains clear that Queer *means*. It is not the case that the term has been reduced to the paralysis of complete in-significance: or at least, if it *has* indeed been rendered no longer functional as signifying language, Queer theorists write as though this is not the case. 'Queer' is not an entirely empty signifier. It has historically been inscribed in a number - but a finite number - of ways. To write histories of Queer Theories is not the same thing as defininig Queer Theory.

Nevertheless, the resistance to definition stands as a metonym for a defining feature of much writing which claims the status of Queer Theory: a desire to transgress. The fear is that to be named, known and brought into the ambit of the mainstream (here, the academy) will result in assimilation.

It is precisely such an assimilation that this paper aims to effect: and to insist, using this case as an example, that the very discourses of assimilation must be retired: for they do not well serve Queer projects.

4. Queer Borg

> [E]xplicitly lesbian and gay businesses, government or local-body funding for lesbian and gay community groups, and the recognition that lesbian and gay constituencies can be

> targeted as an economic or electorial force - are seen by those committed to a Queer agenda as signs not of progress but of how lesbians and gays have been assimilated into mainstream cultural values (Jagose, 1996: 115)

Star Trek worries about assimilation into a bland, faceless and homogenous culture of breeders. Such a fear can also be found in much Queer Theory; indeed, it often stands as a defining trait for those who risk defining Queer enterprises. Matias Viegner suggests that '"assimilationist" gays (different but the same) are the same as straight "breeders"' (Viegner, 1993: 127). If an eternal vigilance is not kept up, if the boundaries of the truly Queer are not carefully policed, one might end up assimilated. One might lose one's own sense of identity; lose contact with one's own culture; with that which makes one human. One might become a breeder.

Queer Theory has included (in part, and as part of an ambidictory project which cannot be totalised) an insistence that assimilation must be fought. Lisa Duggan writes a brief history of homosexual politics. Queer, she states moves beyond 'liberal' gay and lesbian identity politics: those politics, she fears, displayed an 'assimilationist liberal emphasis'. She cites a series of Queer Nation activists defining Queer: 'Queerness means nonassimilationist', says one. For another, Queer is organized around 'issues of anti-assimilation' (quoted in Duggan, 1992: 21). As noted at the head of this essay, Duggan further cites Jeffrey Escoffier and Allan Berube: 'Queer is meant to be confrontational - opposed to gay assimilationists' (quoted in Duggan, 1992: 27). Steven Seidman's version of the same history comments that, among other things, '[i]dentity politics strains towards a narrow, liberal interest group politics around assimilation ...' (Seidman, 1993: 111). For Laura Berlant and Elizabeth Freeman, their article on Queer Nation itself presents an 'anti-assimilationist narrative about an anti-assimilationist movement' (1993: 197). It is thus unsurprising that having stated that Queer Theory has no 'fundamental logic', Jagose can go on to refer to a 'Queer agenda', with confidence that the term will be meaningful: for of course, it is. The Queer agenda, according to all of these writers, is one which rejects 'assimilation'.

As Ki Namaste's paper in this collection makes clear, the scattered nature of sources in this paragraph must be regarded warily. Queer Nation is not the same thing as Queer Theory, and any attempt to generalise 'Queer' across these institutional moments will fail. That is precisely the point of this collection of essays. Bearing this in mind, the variety of sources presented above suggest that in these political groups and theoretical writings which name themselves Queer, a common anti-assimilationist rhetoric can be traced. This is not an

adequate account of Queer: nevertheless, it serves no purpose to deny that a strong anti-assimilationist impulse has formed an important part of Queer in a series of cultural sites.

5. A little bit of history

This paper insists that it is necessary to write a cultural history of Queer: to refuse its status as belonging to ever emergent present (metaphors of time are implicit in writing on identity: to have a past is to become stable, to tend dangerously from becoming into being). It then becomes apparent that some Queer Theories have been anti-assimilationist: and that it is not only Queer Theories which have been anti-assimilationist.

There is no neat distinction between gay assimilationists and an anti-assimilatory Queer politics - as Escoffier and Berube suggest above. Anna Marie Jagose's history of *Queer Theory* points out that gay liberation politics were in fact established with an explicitly anti-assimilatory project:

> Whereas the homophile movement had come to advocate assimilation, gay liberation was constructed around the notion of a distinctly gay identity (Jagose, 1996: 31)

Lesbian and gay identity politics, then, can be understood as themselves anti-assimilatory.

5. Metaphorical wormholes
(connect apparently unconnected space/time sites in the mediasphere)

As Henry Jenkins points out, the television science fiction television series *Star Trek* has never, in any of its incarnations, featured a lesbian or a gay character (Jenkins, 1995). Nonetheless, the program may still prove to be a privileged, if extraterrestrial, site from which to set out on an exploration of lesbian and gay culture. For in science fiction - in television programs such as *Star Trek* - can be found the most colourful and obvious examples of the models by which the relationship of lesbian/gay and heterosexual ('breeder') cultures are often understood in Queer Theory. These are models of assimilation: the logic by which the evil, faceless and utterly banal baddies (often cyborg, less often heterosexual) absorb the brave band of renegades (humans or Queers), who then lose their identities, vanish, and become nothing but statistics. Exploring some of the

dynamics of cultural assimilation in this visible and popular science fiction exploration of the process provides an interesting comparison with Queer Theory's understanding of that same mechanism.

6. They have no concept of the individual

(Counsellor Deanna Troi, 'Best of Both Worlds')

What makes a moment of cultural interaction one of 'assimilation'? Certain conditions must be fulfilled; it is for this reason that science fiction is useful in a consideration of Queer's theories: in these narratives, the process of assimilation is played out in those literalistic terms made possible by the generic expectations of fantasy (Swinfen, 1984). The terms under which Queers might be assimilated become obvious as we look at the ways in which Picard's transformation can be discussed under such a rubric.

The first necessary condition is a recognisable *homogeneity*. The assimilating culture is a bland one. It is static, it has no concept of difference either sychronically nor diachronically. All elements of the culture are self-similar; and it is not open to change over time.

The Borg are, like many assimilating aliens in popular science fiction, marked by their lack of individuality. Indeed, 'the Borg collective consciousness' has literally no individuals: rather, as Commader Shelby notices in the same episode: 'it has a single mind'. In a process of assimilation, the culture which absorbs another destroys the individuality of those it assimilates.

In the words of the Daleks, another supremely in-different semi-robotic species of popular science-fiction: 'Seek. Locate. Do not deviate' (*Doctor Who*, 'Destiny of the Daleks'). In these dominant cultures there is no space for perversion. There is no space for individuality. Assimilation requires that all deviation vanishes, to be replaced by utter conformity.

This is the model into which heterosexual ('breeder') culture must be seen to fit if it is to make any sense to refer to the interaction of Queers with that culture as 'assimilation'. Indeed, it appears that for some writers, this is an adequate account of the dominant culture. For Stephen Dunne, for example, the mainstream, heterosexual culture into which Queers

might be assimilated, is: 'staid, predictable and boring' (Dunne, 1995: 59). For Matias Viegner, it is: 'respectable...boring [and] stupid' (Viegner, 1993: 117). 'Mainstream' culture (117) is conventional, in-different and static. It is a homogenous mass. Into such a way of living might we be assimilated.

7. Feelings? Yes, we have heard of them

> (The Cyberleader, *Doctor Who*, 'Earthshock')

The assimilating culture, in science fiction, is typically emotionless. It lacks passion, feelings, desire; all that makes us (in the logic of Star Trek), 'human' (Tulloch, 1995: 43). In this, a film such as *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* provides the classic science fiction trope of assimilation.

The Borg lack feelings. The implant of the robotic elements in humans makes them logical and unemotional. Another race of half-organic, half-machine creatures, who also reproduce by assimilating humans and grafting technology into their bodies, is *Doctor Who*'s Cybermen. Once again proudly lacking emotions and desires, they can assimilate other cultures - as the quotation which heads this section suggests.

In order for 'breeder' culture to assimilate Queers, it must be conceptualised as similarly lacking any feelings.

> In one of those typically exaggerated statements that makes French theorists so provocative, the psychoanalyst Felix Guattari wrote: 'For me there is no heterosexual sexuality. Once there's heterosexuality, in fact, once there's marriage, there's no more desire, no more sexuality. In all my 25 years work in (psychoanalysis) I have never seen a heterosexual couple who operated along the lines of desire' ... what Guattari meant was that once love or desire is institutionalised in an acceptable form it loses its danger, its heat, its dynamic. In our attempt to fit into and be accepted by straight society, we perhaps too readily forget that there are distinct advantages to being outsiders (O'Donnell, 1996: 8).

Yes, there are feelings left in breeder cultures: but there is no passion. ‘Their’ feelings are constrained and analysed, safe and stable and barely deserving to be named as emotion. In the rhetoric of both science fiction and anti-assimilationist writing, such feelings are not what make us human. For *Star Trek,* it is the illogical and terrible emotions - desire, terror,

selfishness, the urge to self-sacrifice - which define the worth of human life. The loyalty and commitment which the Borg exhibit for each, by contrast, is worthless; at least in terms of making sense of ‘humanity’.

Similarly, for an anti-assimilatory Queer Theory, it is ‘danger’ and ‘heat’ which must be claimed. These are the ‘advantages’ to being outside of the (homogenous) breeder culture.

As straight culture assimilates, it brings Queers into a space like that inhabited by the Borg, the Cybermen and science fiction's other assimilating cultures: a space where what feeling is left is as ‘bland’ as the larger culture is perceived to be. As Julie Burchill glosses these separate spaces (she is talking of elements of straight culture, an interesting comment on the supposed inviolability of Queer as the space of transgression, and one which should be borne in mind):

> Relationship. The world itself is reasonable, tolerant - and singularly unsexy. People who have relationships put the kettle on, talk things out and 'grow'. In other words, they behave like the *Stepford Wives.* People who have *affairs*, on the other hand, have violent sexual intercourse and fist fights. In other words, they behave like human beings. (Burchill, 1992: 46)

Stepford Wives versus 'human beings'. Another science fiction trope, suggesting that assimilation results in lack of passion (of violence) and of sexiness. Assimilated Queer is accused of being unsexy. In a chain of significance which is commonsensical and too densely linked to be properly challenged in this context, sex is linked to passion, which is linked to desire, all of which are collapsed into a general arena of human emotions, and posited as lacking in the culture which will be assimilating us. When Queers are assimilated they lose passion: they become 'asexual' (Dunne, 1995: 62).

Julie Burchill uses this metaphor to defend the passions of heterosexual relationships against the ‘assimilation’ of a science fictionalised homogenous mass - banal, mainstream, suburban. This point is important. From Ira Levin’s novel *This Perfect Day* to Sylvester Stallone’s movie *Demolition Man*, heterosexual science fiction narratives have imagined the threat of assimilation into a homogenous, passionless mainstream. This threat can only be countered by blatant (passionate) displays of (masculine) heterosexuality. In Levin’s novel, this is a rape (where the passive woman finally comes to enjoy it), in Stallone’s movie, merely a pushy kiss (but again, the passive woman finally comes to enjoy it). The vision of a passionless mass is one of the most consistent modes of creating a dystopian

future. The fact that Queer Theory takes up such models for itself suggests that in the very use of the metaphor of assimilation to describe cultural interaction, Queer Theory is being assimilated by the heterosexual cultural imaginary.

8. The knowledge and experience of the human Picard is part of us now

(Locutus of Borg, 'Best of Both Worlds')

The model of 'assimilation' also proposes particular implications for the dominant, assimilating culture. The nature of this culture is not at all changed by those it absorbs. It does, however, take something from them: knowledge.

The absorption of Captain Picard into the Borg collective does not change the nature of the aliens. It does, however, result in Picard's knowledge being taken by the Borg.

> The knowledge and experience of the human Picard is part of us now. It has prepared us for all possible courses of action. Your resistance is hopeless. (Locutus of Borg, 'Best of Both Worlds' part 2).

The Oxford English Dictionary suggests that implications of such a process are part of 'assimilation' itself:

> Assimilation ... The process whereby the individual acquires new ideas, by interpreting ideas and experience (Oxford English Dictionary, 1989: 714)

As commonplace (post-Focauldian) formulations will remind us, 'knowledge is power'. To be assimilated is to be known; to be known is to be open to control. The model of assimilation implies powerlessness on the part of the minority culture; the USS Enterprise's attempts to resist this alien, assimilating culture are rendered useless by the very fact that members of the crew have already been assimilated. With the 'knowledge and experience' they have stolen, the Borg are prepared for every move the heroes make, and understand the humans all too well. With each Queer who is assimilated, our chances for resistance become less, not only as our numbers decrease, but as the enemy - the assimilating culture - gains knowledge and comes to understand us too well.

> "Queer" as the endlessly mutating token of non-assimilation (and hence as the utopian badge of a would-be "authentic" position of resistance) may reflect a certain bourgeois aspiration to be always au courant ... (Lee Edelman, quoted in Halperin, 1995: 67).

There are pleasures to marginality, as the reclamation of 'Queer' suggests, and to be too well known is to allow, much worse than the hatred which comes from ignorance: the contempt which is bred by familiarity.

9. Resistance is hopeless...

> (Locutus of Borg, 'Best of Both Worlds')

Science fiction also proposes particular notions of what counts as 'resistance'. This term is a popular one for Queer cultural theory which aims to describe the relations between cultures (Viegner, 1993: 127). But in that writing, which seeks to decide what counts as resistance - and what is, by contradistinction, assimilation - there is little sense of the debates which have taken place for decades in such writing about the nature of resistance. In anti-assimilatory Queer Theory, resistance seems to be as commonsensical and obvious a term as it is in *Star Trek*. In that television program, resistance involves stopping the aliens from accomplishing their desire (to rule earth) by a variety of physical engagements - chasing, shooting, fighting, challenging, and finally, blowing up.

It appears that in Queer Theory, a similar model of resistance obtains. The language is similar, and its implications similarly Manichean. As Matias Viegner ponders the question of elements of the assimilated culture resurfacing in the dominant space, he asks: 'Are these cases of "genuine" resistance or of assimilation?' (Viegner, 1993: 127). The terms are dichotomous and irreconcilable. Resistance versus assimilation. It is not possible to work within the dominant culture and to be resisting. Resistance implies a guerilla warfare, as in *Star Trek*: rather than any kind of undercover operation. To be part of the Borg is to be fully absorbed. Once this point is passed there is no longer any possibility for resistance; and thus any act which might appear to be an act of resistance is not - as the above quotation suggests - *genuine*.

For Stephen Dunne, those Queers who have been mainstreamed are: 'assimilationist, happily consumerist and deeply conservative' (Dunne, 1995: 65). Politics fits as neatly into these Manichean duopolies: resistance-assimilation, radical-conservative. There is no

space for doubt in these ontological assertions. In *Star Trek*, there is human and Borg, bad and good, and scant little in between (even the unattractive human characters pull together in the end). In assimilation, it is equally obvious how politics function: that which is not radical is conservative; that which is not 'resistance' is 'assimilation'.

10. We do not live in *Star Trek*

These are some of the elements by which a cultural interaction might be recognised as assimilation. But when the elements of the metaphor are made more explicit, how convincing does it remain? Is it possible to identify a discrete, homogenous and static culture named 'mainstream' and 'heterosexual'? Is it convincing to argue that this heterosexual culture competely lacks any difference? That it has no place for the individual? That it functions entirely without passion? How believable is a model of cultural interaction which posits a complete transfer of power in one direction, and suggests a dominant culture so static, so powerful and yet so *absorbent*, that it can completely soak up another without making any changes to itself?

The use of science fiction models hopefully suggests the distance between such a conception of culture and that in which we currently live. As Steve Neale has suggested, part of the generic functioning of science fiction is precisely that it is recognised as unbelieveable, that texts functioning in this genre must always be obvious as distanced from contemporary experience (Neale, 1990). As with all metaphor, the social commentary of science-fiction is based as much on difference from the object described as similarity to it.

The assimilated Picard may provide a neat and amusing metophor with which Queer theorists can berate breeders for their lack of individuality and feelings; but the inhuman and undifferentiated zombie is obviously distant from the experience of most people living in the supposedly 'assimilating' mass of 'mainstream' culture. The degree to which we can recognise the Borg Picard as science fiction is the degree to which this model of assimilation is unfair to current cultural situations. And more than this, it is unfair to Queer Theories.

11. Other Queers

Queer Theory has offered possibilities for rethinking our models of culture, communities, identity, and the interaction of these entities. Having traced one strand of writing that comes under the umbrella of Queer, this paper now wanders off to suggest in a relatively unsystematic way the other possibilities - what seem to me to be more attractive possibilities - which have been equally as well accepted as Queer. They bear little relation to the anti-assimilatory positions outlined above. Queer Theories are ambidictory. This is as close to an axiom as this paper allows itself.

After structuralist theory it should be difficult to imagine a discursive entity like a 'culture' being fully present to itself, never mind stable enough to destroy another such entity. Cultures are always already simulacra, series of discursive presences lacking in an essential and stable core. From such a perspective, the idea that such entities have an ideal essence which could absorb another while remaining unaltered is an odd one. Cultures are interpretive, abstract and virtual creations. Meaning itself is never stable: much less so cultures.

More than this, a model of static and opposed power blocs fits poorly with much of the way in which 'Queer' has been mobilised as a theoretical term. Indeed, within some writing which takes a ‘Queer’ status (for example, Dunne, 1995), a self-contradictory position emerges: anti-assimilationist rhetoric allows a profound form of identity politics to be taken up: an anti-identity identity politics. ‘They’ have been assimilated; ‘we’ remain radically transgressive and fluid.

As a move away from rigid identity politics, Queer also offers the promise of cultures which are precisely *not* conceptualised in this way. It is a poststructuralist term, an identifier of sexuality which moves beyond stable and essential cores. Following on from this position, a Queer reading of culture quite distinct from that of anti-assimilationist Queer Theories can be found in the work of Alexander Doty, for example:

> the Queer often operates within the nonQueer, as the nonQueer does within the Queer ... within cultural production and reception, Queer erotics are already part of culture's erotic centre ... (Doty, 1995: 73)

This position strikes me as slightly odd, simply for its use of the term ‘nonQueer’ (whatever its ironic status). This version of Queer does not rely on concepts of identity in order to understand the individual and the culture in which she operates. Yet the use of Queer and nonQueer still points to identity politics of the most binaristic kind.

Nevertheless, Doty points towards another recognisably Queer project: that of retheorising culture: proposing other models of than simply centres and margins. Elspeth Probyn, for example, suggests the concept of 'the outside':

> the outside ... is a more adequate figure for thinking about social relations and the social than either an interior/exterior or a center/marginal model (Probyn, 1996: 11)

While anti-assimilatory models of culture, in their fear of being taken over by unattractive mainstream cultures, prescribe only a very limited number of ways of living as suitable for lesbians and gay men, 'Queer' models allow an attractive rewriting of the power relations involved in the interaction of cultures more generally. Such a reconceptualisation of culture is one of the dangers - and joys - of Queer: the theory has allowed a rereading of what counts as a centre. As Doty suggests, the Queer may already be at, and always have been at, the centre of the dominant culture which anti-assimilationist Queer finds to be homogenous and bland. David Halperin approaches this possibility with a slight sense of hesitation, but a cheekiness that points to its joyful possibilities:

> Queer ... demarcates not a positivity, but a positionality vis-a-vis the normative - a positionality that is not restricted to lesbians and gay men, but is in fact available to anyone who is or who feels marginalised because of his or her sexual practices: it could include some married couples without children, for example, or even (who knows?) some married couples *with* children - with, perhaps, *very naughty* children (Halperin, 1995: 62)

Grasping such a possibility, Maria Pallotta-Chiarolli finds in that terrible space named 'the suburbs' accounts of sexuality which bear little relation to the supposedly normative sexual spaces anti-assimilationist writing supposes inhabit that dominant (central) terrain (Pallotta-Chiarolli, 1996). In the Australian context, this argument is played out in particularly visible terms. In an article entitled 'The Sum of Us', Gabrielle Carey addresses the mainstream audience of a major newspaper; and suggests that the Sydney Lesbian and Gay Mardi Gras is in fact a central part of what it now means to be Australian:

> besides ... Anzac Day ... our only other popularly supported, well-attended celebration is the Sydney Lesbian and Gay Mardi Gras. It could be argue that the Mardi Gras is Australia's most genuinely grassroots ritual celebration. Although the Mardi Gras as such is modelled on a foreign idea, the inspiration for the festival came from the people on the ground. It is something that has grown out of the community ... (Carey, 1995: 32)

The Lesbian and Gay Mardi Gras in Sydney, Australia is a massive festival celebrating bodies and sexuality, non-monogamy, spectacle, pleasure, desire, drug-enhanced sexual practices, community and support. It is now understood to be a central part of precisely that mainstream, bland assimilating community against which some Queer is so set. In order to make this argument, anti-assimilationist Queer must make clear that the Mardi Gras is in fact part of the monogamous, unpassionate, suburban ideal it so hates:

> ... there were some who suspected that Sydney had begun to neutralise the parade's marginality and to tame its disrespect; that the parade's subversions and perversions, its naughty imitations of the heterosexual matrix, could now be billed as safe tourist fare (Harris, 1995: 20)

But as a prime example of assimilation, the Mardi Gras also makes clear the difficulties of the metaphor. 'Mainstream' culture is not unaffected by the supposed absorption. As Australia continually partakes in the discursive reformulation of its own identity, the Mardi Gras becomes central to the mainstream notion of itself. Australianness becomes Queer. Certainly, 'marginality' is lost: but it is perhaps rather the notion of marginality that is lost than simply ‘our’ experience of it. Taking up Doty’s terminology Queer is already at the centre of the non-Queer, the non-Queer of the Queer: the binaries collapse when them is already us - and vice versa.

> In a traditional philosophical opposition we have not a peaceful coexistence of facing terms, but a violent hierarchy. One of the terms dominates the other ... To deconstruct the opposition is above all, at a particular moment, to reverse the hierarchy (Jacques Derrida, quoted in Culler, 1983: 85).

As Jagose writes the history of Queer, Eve Kosoksky Sedgewick initiated the public circulation of Queer Theory with the suggestion that 'heterosexuality is derivative of homosexuality' (Jagose, 1996: 16). Similarly, it is simple enough now to argue that the 'straight' is merely a subset of the Queer. If such a Queer reformulation is accepted, then it becomes the case that those who have traditionally been written as the majority: the stable, nuclear, carefully hierarchical family, are in fact simply a subset of Queer practices: the slightly less Queer version of social experience in the Western twentieth century. Straightness is revealed to be a subset of a more generalised Queer relationship to culture: a particular way of being marginalised. The nonQueer is already part of the Queer, the Queer of the nonQueer.

Similarly, the relations of assimilation and resistance might be rewritten in terms of supplementarity: that the terms are not set in a non-negotiable relation of opposites. The models can be redeployed so that resistance is understood to be a subset of assimilation. If assimilation and resistance both signal the interaction of cultures, then all culture involves 'assimilation', the acceptance and translation of the forms of communication of another culture: while all interaction similarly involves resistance, the speaking against, the lack of exact fit which results in any meeting of the non-identical.

12. Resistance is ....

For the Starship Enterprise, resisting assimilation is a physical act. Keeping themselves physically and environmentally separate from the Borg, the individualistic and transgressive (human, emotional) crew embark on a phaser attack on the Borg ship. As Duggan suggests, Queer-ly named, anti-assimilatory political movements has often worked with similar models of resistance. But other Queer Theories - other Queer models of culture - lead to quite a model of resistance which bears little relation to the avowedly anti-assimilationist work of Queer Nation (Duggan, 1992).

> Power is everywhere. Resistance to power takes place from within power ... What escapes from relations of power ... does not escape the reach of power to a place outside power, but represents the limit of power, its reversal or rebound. *The aim of oppositional politics is therefore not liberation but resistance* (Halperin, 1995: 18, italics in original).

Cultures are not discrete entities: and resistance cannot, therefore, take place from privileged positions outside of culture. For a poststructuralist version of politics, resistance necessarily takes place inside the shifting systems of meaning and value which constitute a culture. This must be as true for Queer as for other politics:

> 'the homosexual' is not a stable or autonomous term but a supplement to the definition of 'the heterosexual' - a means of stabilising a heterosexual identity ... The heterosexual/homosexual binarism is itself a homophobic production ... (Halperin, 1995: 43-44).

And the Queer/assimilated binarism? Working with these models of culture, oppositional politics must seek not to preserve the purity of these categories, but to invoke strategic moments of deconstruction.

Indeed, it may prove that resistance is only made possible through assimiliation. As Keith Gandal argues:

> resistance cannot stand in pure opposition to the powers that be, but ... instead, struggle and change always take place through co-optation ... in fact, change is made possible through co-optation because, in the process of co-optation, in assimilating the resistance, the terms of power change ... (Keith Gandal, quoted in Halperin, 1995: 54).

'[I]n assimilating the resistance, the terms of power change'. This provides another 'Queer' politics. Assimilation is not opposed to resistance: it is a necessary precondition for it. And as the deconstruction of 'culture' continues, the space of 'politics' is similarly redefined (Derrida, 1993: 212): it is no longer obvious that resistance is conducted by heroic and isolated groups of humans, training their guns on faceless inhuman enemies.

It is a commonplace in cultural studies that resistance need no longer be conceptualised merely as physical presence in certain places or alignment with certain institutions - marching in the streets for example (although, of course, Queer culture, with its very own militia of 'marching boys', may do this very well). In 1982, for example, Dick Hebdidge suggested, in relation to the feared assimilation of British working class youth by 'Americanisation':

> the style of the teddy boys can be interpreted less as the dull reflex of a group of what Hoggart called 'tamed and directionless helots' to a predigested set of norms and values than as an attribution of meaning, as an attempt at imposition and control, as a symbolic act of self-removal (Hebdige, 1982: 216)

In the face of a feared assimilation into a bland and undifferentiated mass, it is already possible for cultural studies to assert that 'style' is resistance. Perhaps this is the fear of anti-assimilationist Queer: that there is no space for such 'style', in the space of the 'breeder' 'mainstream'.

This seems to be an overly precious stance. As Hebdige suggests, resistance need not be outside of a culture; as teddy boys were not 'assimilated' by a culture whose space and signs they appropriated, so it is crude and simplistic to insist on the assimilation of those Queers who take up elements of what has been recognised as a 'mainstream' sexuality. The style which is practiced might not be the 'style' recognised by these Queer writers, but it reminds us that to live within a culture is not to be a homogenous, undifferentiated part of it.

There are, then, other Queer versions of ‘resistance’; or of thinking of the urge to change which has previously been marked by such a term:

> [A]s Achille Mbembe argues, instead of a logic of resistance, 'the emphasis should be on the logics of conviviality, on the dynamics of domesticity and familiartiy which inscribe the dominant and the dominated in the same epistomological field ...' The focus here is trained on the relations between the two, a closeness that upsets the protected space of the dominant (Probyn, 1996: 29).

12. Finale

This paper has used science-fiction to argue that the metaphors of 'assimilation' which are often employed to describe the interaction between Queer and straight cultures are not only ungenerous, but in fact inadequate to the ways in which cultures function as processual, dynamic and fluid entities. The assimilation offered by science fiction can only work when the cultures in question are, precisely, in-human: robotic, controlled and bloodless. In order to make these metaphors function, science fiction finds it necessary to literalise this inhumanity: and in this process makes clear that human beings, whatever the patronising attitudes of those who disdain mass (heterosexual) culture, are not in fact robots. It is possible to tell the difference between a Borg and a heterosexual person.

But in a final twist, the text used to make this point - *Star Trek: The Next Generation*, 'Best of Both Worlds' - may in fact contribute to the argument made above: that assimiliation itself is not, after all, an undesirable process.

In the denouement of this story, the intrepid crew of the USS Enterprise are reduced to the status of a band of refugees, marginal guerilla fighters when the entire Federation starfleet is destroyed by a bad-tempered Borg ship. Their captain has been 'assimilated', becoming an inhuman cyborg who does not recognise any of his friends, and although he has been rescued and returned to the ship, he is still working for the aliens. But it is precisely his assimilated state that allows the heroes finally to defeat the aliens at the end of the two hours: for the captain is now a part of the Borg mind, and - here's the twist - enough of the human Picard remains as Picard, within this Borg mind, to enable him to fight back for the humans, telling the Borg collective mind to shut down. In short, because he has been assimilated into the (mainstream) Borg consciousness, he can defeat it - *from the inside*.

This is the more attractive potency of assimilation as a metaphor. While it is claimed that it dehumanises and reprograms, it rather puts the marginal group in the position to destroy the (imaginary) homogenous assimilating culture from the inside. Perhaps, in this case, being assimilated is not something we should dread after all. Perhaps we should be training our Queer spies to be assimilated into their masses, and prepare to turn the 'nonQueer' dominant culture (which is always, of course, already Queer) inside out.

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